

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON PROGRAM EVALUATION:  
NEW PARADIGMS FOR EVALUATING  
DIPLOMACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
June 8-9, 2010

Anti-Terrorism Track

PowerPoint presentation from workshop on  
A Social Science Approach to Strategic Influence Evaluation:  
Good Evaluation Starts at the Beginning

Session transcript:  
<http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/rm/2010/148035.htm>

# A Social Science Approach to Strategic Influence Evaluation: Good Evaluation Starts at the Beginning

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Joint Military Information Support Command  
8 June 2010

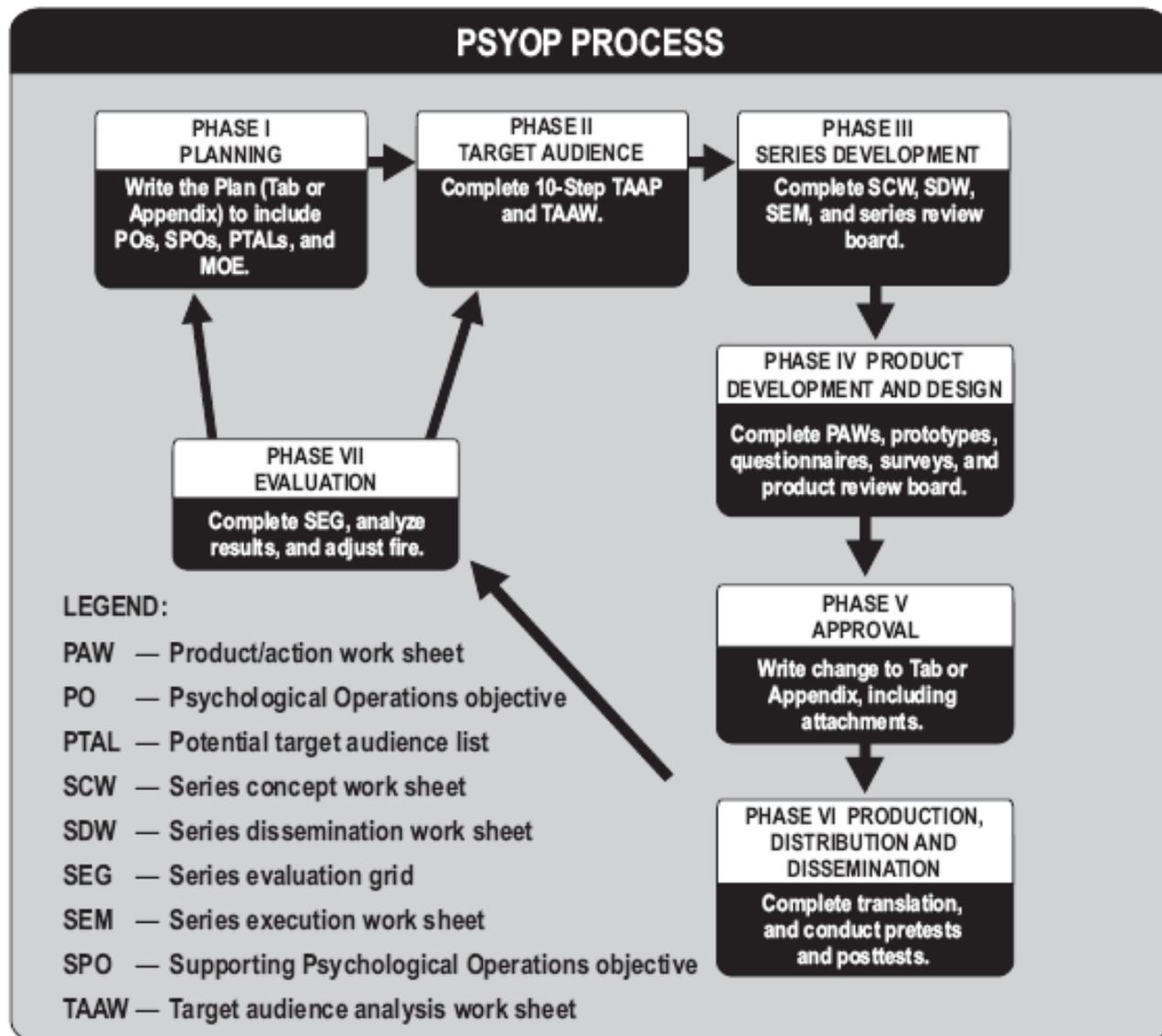


# Agenda

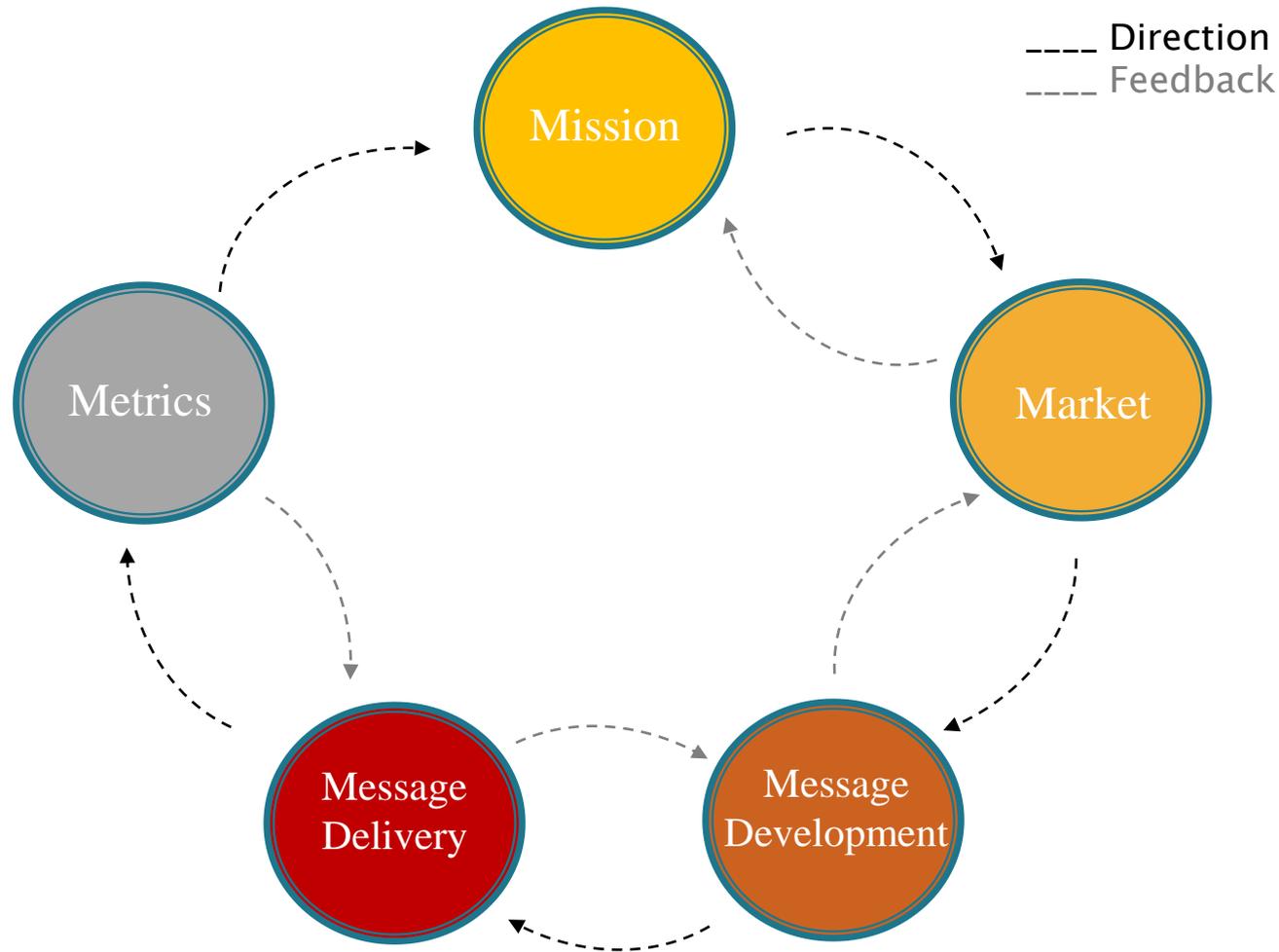
- ▶ Evaluations: Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Process vs. Strategic Communications Model
- ▶ Social and Behavioral Sciences...Why?
- ▶ Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement (MMD) Explained
- ▶ Application of MMD to Strategic Influence Campaigns
- ▶ Conclusion



# Psychological Operations Process



# Strategic Communication Model



\*Adapted from 2008  
State INR/BBG Deep Dive



# Social & Behavioral Sciences

- ▶ Process models lack any kind of underlying theoretical framework
  - Operate on what to do and in what sequence
  - Not clear how what they do is supposed to work to impact social behaviors
- ▶ In order to influence attitudes and behaviors, one must understand why people behave the way they do
- ▶ Frameworks (theories) provide a basis for research, strategy, and evaluation



# Social & Behavioral Sciences

## ▶ Social/Behavioral Science Theories Abound...

- Attitude Accessibility
- Attitude-to-Attitude
- Reactance
- Cognitive Dissonance
- Self-Perception Theory
- Social Learning Theory
- Others...
- Ideation Model
- Elaboration Likelihood Model
- Problematic Integration Theory
- Cultivation Theory
- Cognitive Response Model
- Theory of Reasoned Action

*“The social and behavioral sciences...provide insight as to what PSYOP soldiers should take into consideration when planning and conducting PSYOP.”*

– FM 3–5.301 Psychological Operations Process  
Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures, Aug 2007



# Moral Disengagement

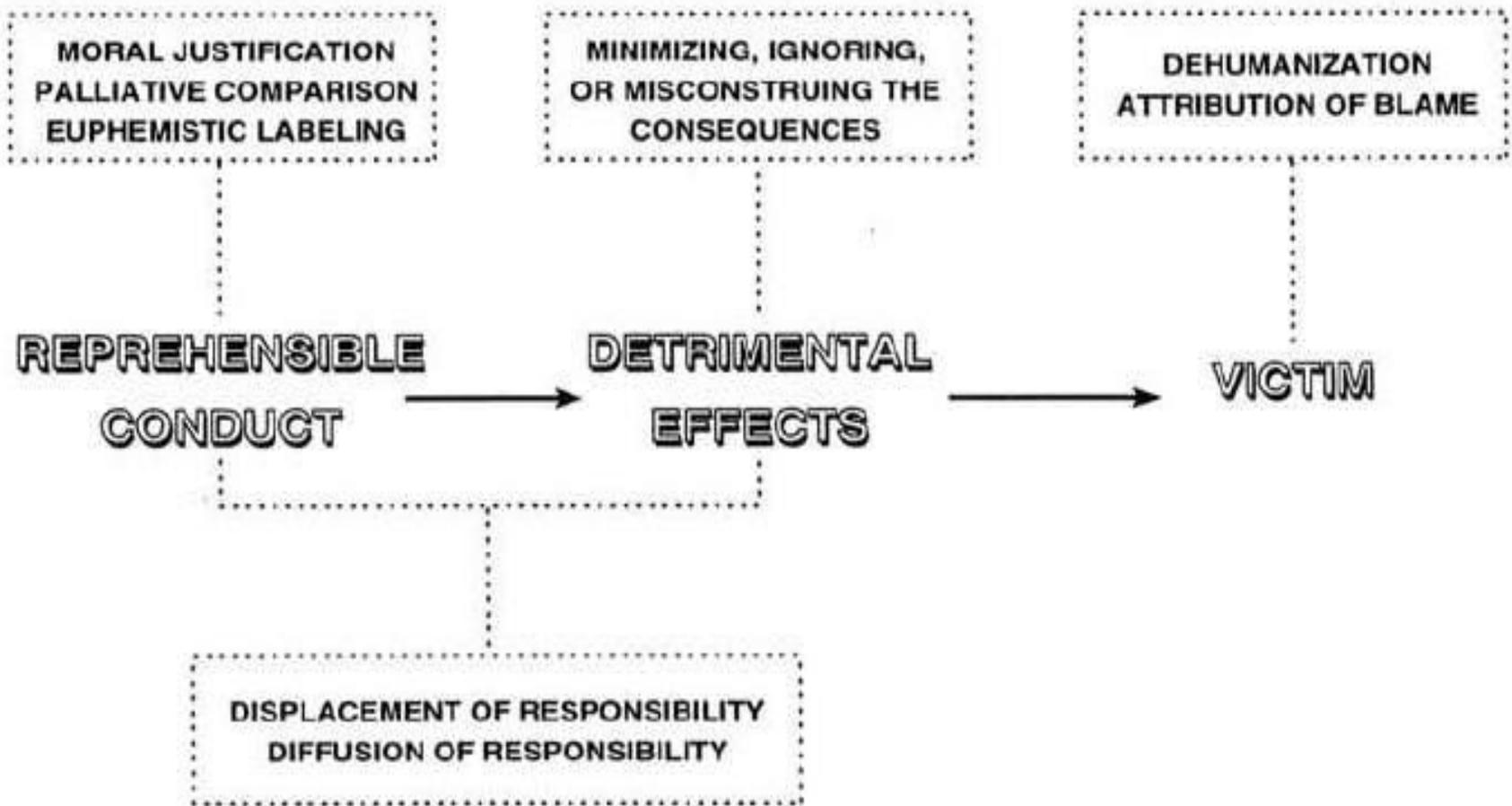
- ▶ Defined: A cognitive process by which people excuse harming others.
- ▶ Provides one means to better understand how a campaign may be developed and assessed using sound psycho-social constructs
- ▶ Not sufficient to account for all violent extremist activities

*“To influence man’s thought is far more important and more lasting in effect than to control their bodies or regulate their actions...”*

– B.H. Liddel Hart



# Moral Disengagement



Adapted from *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (p. 376) by A. Bandura, 1986. Copyright 1986 by Prentice-Hall, Inc.



# Moral Disengagement

- ▶ Assuming a hypothetical objective of influencing the radicalization process feeding terrorist activities...
- ▶ How can MMD be applied to strategic influence campaigns?
  - Target Audience Analysis and Segmentation
  - Prescription for content development
  - Measure of effectiveness



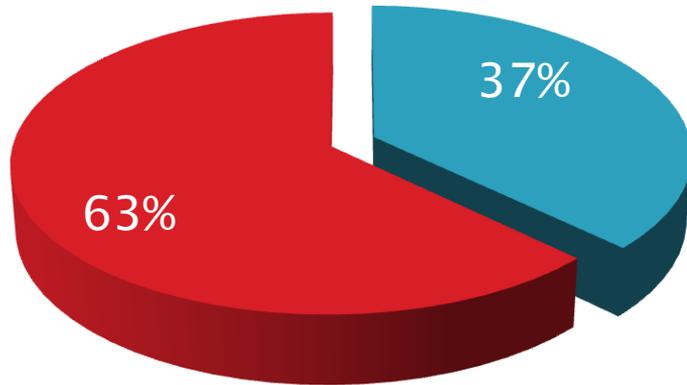
# Target Audience Segmentation

- ▶ Segmentation criteria
  - Segment relatively homogeneous on variables use to create segments
  - Segments relatively distinct from each other
  - Segments based on meaningful variables
- ▶ Segmentation methodology
  - Two-Step Cluster Analysis: groups respondents into clusters based on responses
  - Allows for examination of similarities on items within and between clusters
- ▶ Cluster solution
  - Optimal number of clusters based on distinctiveness of clusters and ability to target
  - Two identifiable Segments: hi vs. low MD



# Target Audience Segmentation

## Moral Disengagement



- Multi-stage random sample of pan-Arab men (n=2,165)
  - 9 countries (approximately 240 per)
  - 15 to 30 years old
  - Self-identified as Muslim

- ▶ Significant Cluster Differences:
  - Tolerance
  - Altruistic Behavior
  - Acceptance of Violence
  - Stressful Life Events



# Target Audience Segmentation

- ▶ Allows for greater specificity for targeting, revelation of vulnerabilities, accessibility, and susceptibility
- ▶ Provides baseline data for measures of effectiveness



# Prescription for Stimulus Development

- ▶ Has MMD been used in the past?
- ▶ Can it be countered/corrected?
  - Research indicates that knowledge of MMD can help inoculate from disengagement
  - Knowing how each of the eight mechanisms resonate within the TA can help prescribe how messages can be developed to counter.

*“Strategic influence is an art and science. The more that we can know about the science, the better art we can produce.”*



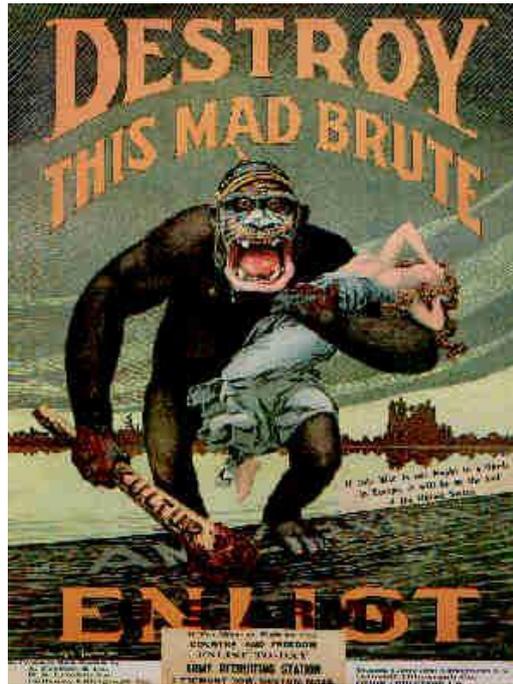
# Prescription for Stimulus Development

In the jihad they are carrying out Allah's will as "*religious duty*." By attribution of blame, terrorist strikes are construed a morally justifiable defense reactions to humiliation and atrocities perpetrated by atheistic forces.... Bin Laden bestializes the American enemy as "*lowly people*" perpetrating acts the "*the most ravenous of animals would not descent to*." Terrorism is sanitized as "*the winds of faith have come*" to eradicate the "*debauched oppressors*." His followers see themselves as "*holy warriors*" who gain "*blessed eternal life*" through their "*martyrdom*."

– Albert Bandura, 2004



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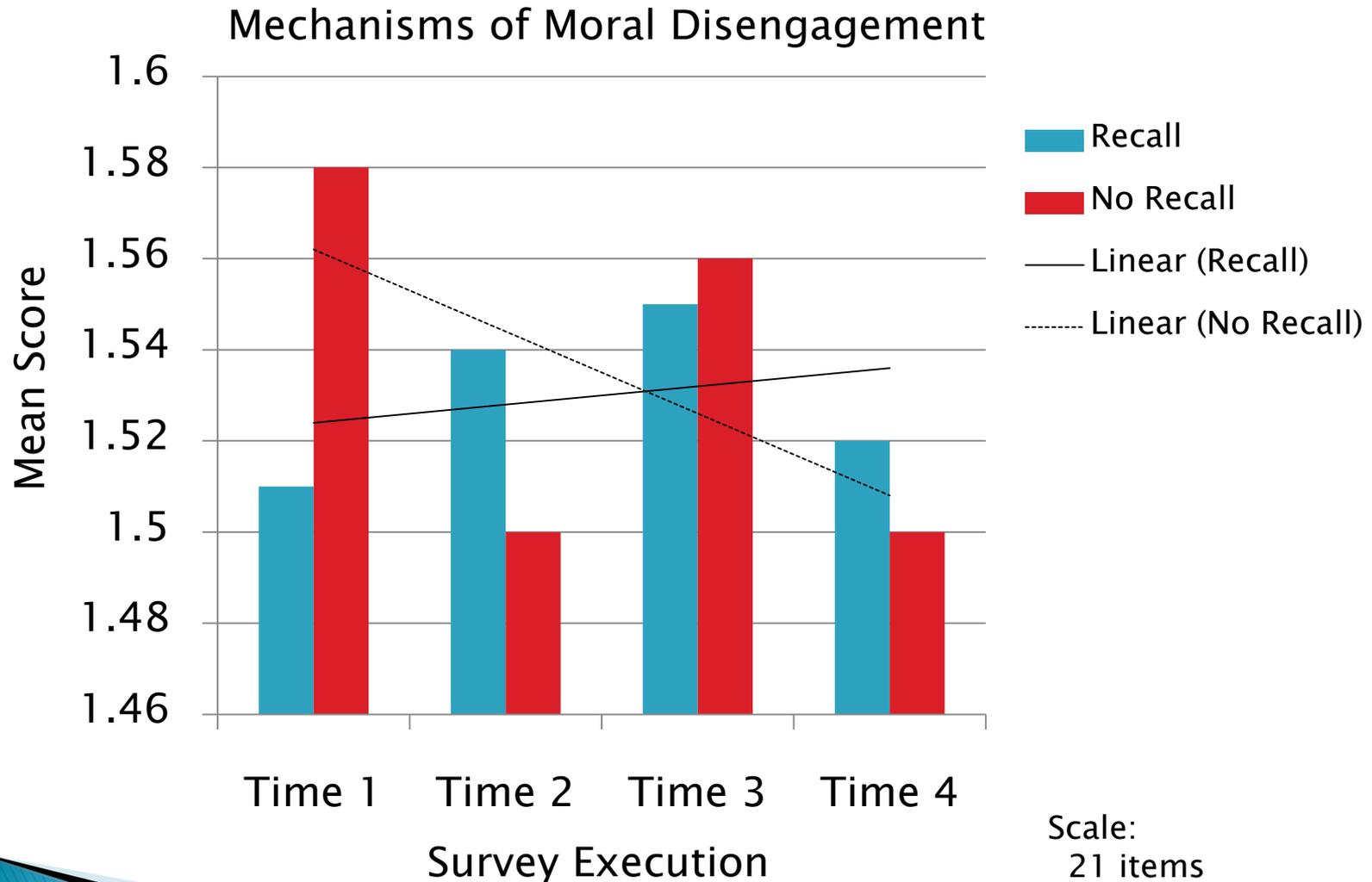


# Evaluation of Strategic Influence

- ▶ Cross-sectional (between group) and longitudinal (tracking/trend) analysis of levels of MD within a TA
  - Differences between those aware of campaign and those who are not
  - Trending population levels (i.e., size of cluster) over time
- ▶ Assesses campaign effectiveness on this construct, and provides a feedback mechanism, prescription of future messaging



# Evaluation of Strategic Influence



Scale:  
21 items  
3-point scale  
\*No significant differences



# Conclusion

- ▶ Study Limitations
- ▶ Strong benefits for strategic influence and persuasion
  - Target Audience Segmentation
  - Stimulus Development
  - Measures of Effect
- ▶ Other benefits
  - Analyzing terrorist messaging using a framework of MMD
  - Allows for counter-messaging by making TA aware of the mechanisms



# Conclusion

Good Evaluation Starts  
at the Beginning!



# Disclaimer & Acknowledgements

This presentation does not necessarily represent the position or policies of the Joint Military Information Support Command, United States Special Operations Command, or the Department of Defense, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Special Thanks...

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